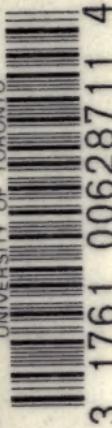


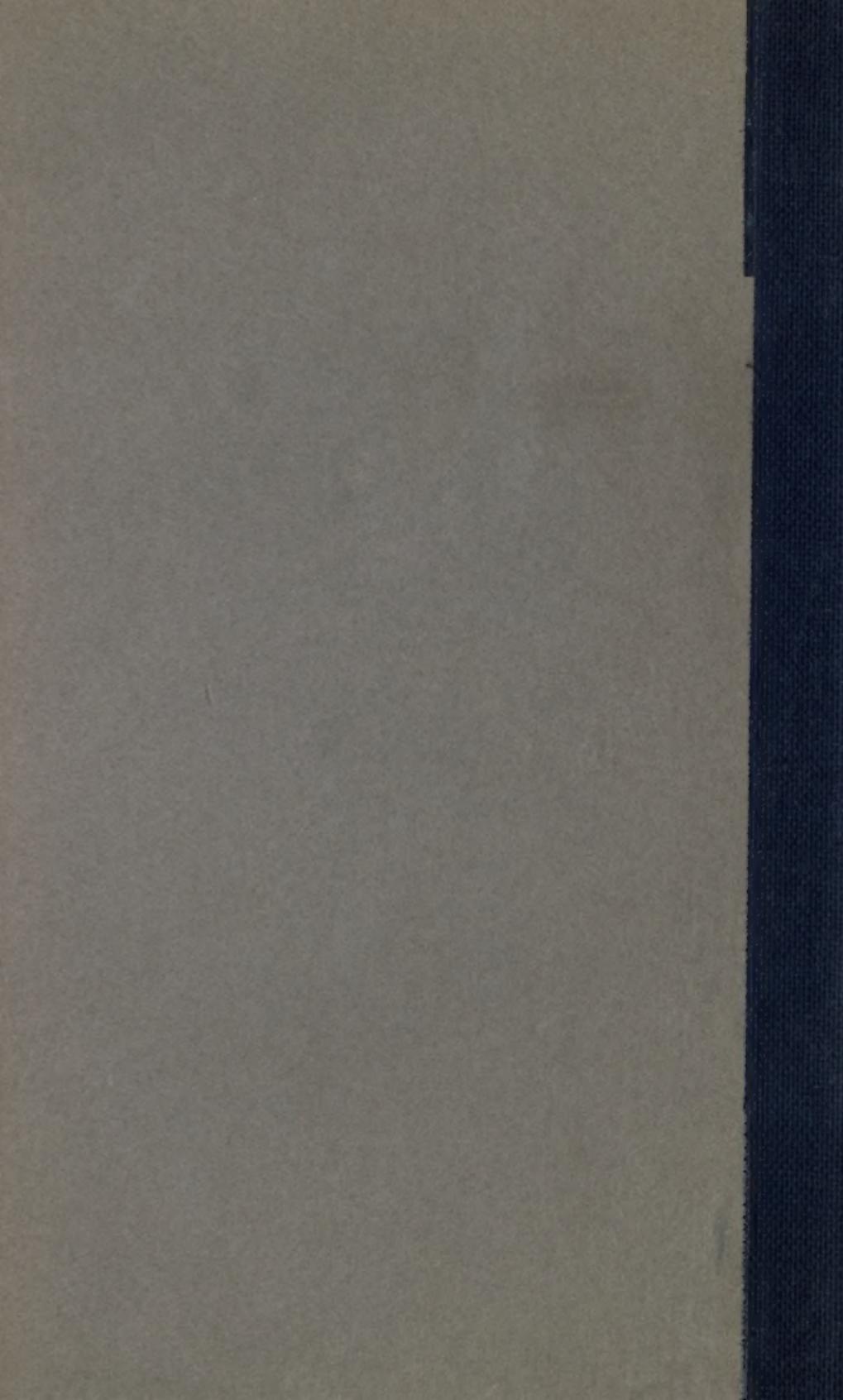
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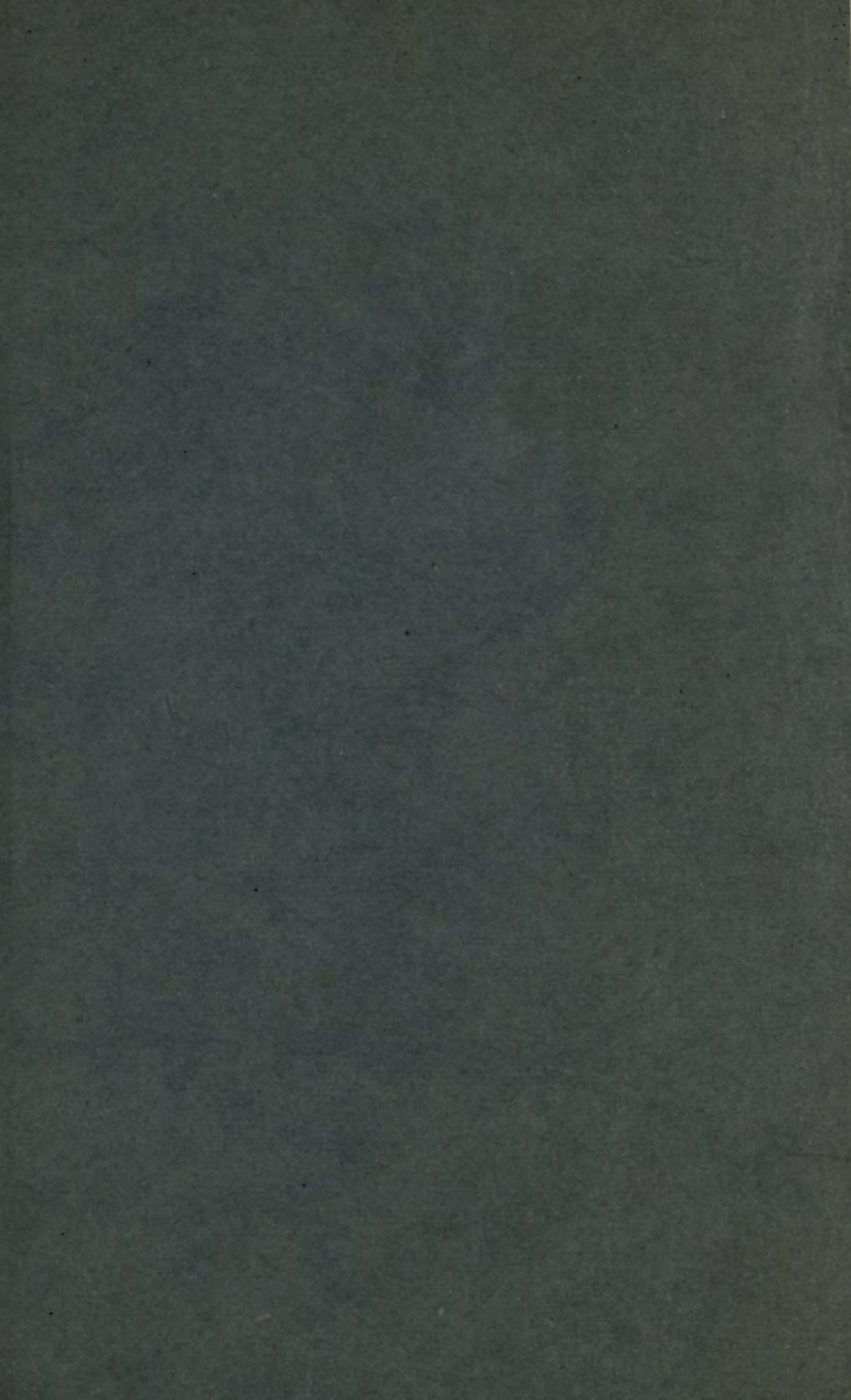


THE STORM

BY

JOHN DRINKWATER

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THE STORM

A PLAY IN ONE ACT

By

JOHN DRINKWATER



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To
BARRY V. JACKSON

The Characters are—

ALICE.

JOAN, her young Sister.

SARAH.

AN OLD MAN.

A YOUNG STRANGER.

The Storm

A mountain cottage. It is a midwinter night. Outside a snowstorm rages.

ALICE is looking through the window. JOAN, her young sister, and SARAH, an old neighbour woman, are sitting over the fire.

Alice: It isn't fair of God. Eyes are no good,
Nor lanterns in a blackness like to that.
How can they find him out? It isn't fair.

Sarah: God is for prayers. You'll anger Him
speaking so.

Alice: I have prayed these hours, and now I'm
tired of it.
He is caught in some grip of the rocks, and crying
out,
And crying and crying, and none can hear him cry,
Because of this great beastliness of noise.

Sarah: Past crying now, I think.

Joan: There, take no heed
Of what she says— it's a rusty mind she has,
Being old, and wizened with bad luck on the hills.

Sarah: Rusty or no, I've a thought the man is
dead.
No news has been growing apace from nightfall on
Into bad news, and now it's as though one stood
At the door and said—we found him lying cold.

Alice: Whist! you old bitter woman. Will it
never stay
In its wicked fury, . . . and the snow's like a
black rain

Whipping the crying wind. If it would rest awhile
I could think and mind me what were best to do
To help my man. But a savagery like this
Beats at the wits till they have no tidiness.

Sarah: We'll sit and wait till they come.

Alice: And I a woman
Would never let him ask for anything,
Because of the daily thought I took for him,—
And against this spite now I've no strength at all

Sarah: For all you would bake his bread to a
proper turn
And remember always the day for his clean shift,
There was many a scolding word for him to bear.

Joan: Hush—

Alice: Let her talk. What does she know at all,—
Thinking crossed words between a man and a woman
Have anything to do with the heart? We have,
My man and I, more than a fretful mood
Can thieve or touch. My man—I must go myself.

Joan: There is nothing you could do.

Sarah: 'Tis men
Should carry the dead man in.

Alice: My man
Is alive I say—surely my man's not dead—
Surely, I say—old woman, your croaking talk
Teases my brain like the pestilence out there
Till I doubt the thing I know. There's not a crag
Or cleft of the hills but is natural to him
As the stairs beyond the door there—surely, surely—
Yet nothing is sure.

Sarah: Death has a way with him,
A confident way.

Alice: You know that he's not dead—
I know that too—if only that dark rage

Howling out there would leave tormenting me,
And let me reason it out in peace a little,
I could be quite, quite sure that he's not dead.

Sarah: Age is a quiet place where you can watch
The world bent with its pain and still be patient,
And warm your hands by the fire because you know
That the newest sorrow and the oldest sorrow are one.
They will bring him and put him down upon the
floor :

Be ready for that, girl. There are times when hope
is cruel
As a fancy-man that goes without good-bye.

Alice I have a brain that is known in three shire-
towns

For a level bargain. It is strange that I should be
Listening now to a cracked old woman's clatter
When my own thoughts for him should be so clear
That I shouldn't heed the words of another body.
I want no hope—only an easy space
To remember the skill of my man among the hills
And how he would surely match their cunning with
his,—

Or else to count the hours that he's been gone
And see that his chance is whittled quite away.
To have a living thought against this fear
Is all I want—but those screaming devils there
Beat in my mind like the drums in Carnarvon streets
That they use when they want to cheat folk into
thinking

That death is a handsome trade.—And so
I let a woman with none but leaky wits
Tell me the way I should be,—when most I need
To ride no borrowed sense.

Sarah: It is not wind,
For all it is louder than any flood on the hills,
Nor the crazy snow that maddens you till your brain
Is like three cats howling upon a wall,

But the darkness that comes creeping on a woman
When she knows of grief before it is spoken out.
And the sooner grieved is grief the sooner gone.
Be ready to make him decent for the grave.

Joan: If he should walk in now you will not forget
The trouble you are putting in the house with your
talk.

Sarah: The trouble is here

Alice: If he should walk in now—
Yes, that's the way to think. I'll work it out,
Slowly, his doings from when he left the door
Until he comes again. You stood at the oven
With cakes half-browned against his tea. And I
Stood here beside my man and strapped his coat
Under his chin. He looked across your way—
He is fond of you, child—he calls you Father Joan
Because—but that's not it—I told him then
To-morrow would be time to bring the slates,
And let him only mend the wire to-day—
He thought so too and said—it is like a beast
Greater than half the world and crushed in a trap,
Shrieking against the pain—what did he say?—
I have forgotten now, and I had begun
To follow it all quite clearly—what did he say?

Joan: That an hour would see him back, and
hungry too.

Alice: An hour would bring him back—but that is
nothing.

I know it now: he went to the broken wire
And mended it—three quarters of an hour—
And then he would think that after all the slates
Were best bespoken now—six miles to go:
He would be about a mile when this began—
This wrath that will surely last till the Judgment
Day—
And that would make two hours till he reached the
quarry—

But he went on, and the neighbours up and down
Were scared and went out searching with their
lanterns,
Like lighted gnats searching the mines of hell.
Isn't it queer to see them out there dancing
When all the time he has gone a twelve mile
journey—
And then this old woman came with her neighbour
duty—
It's odd folk are,—

Sarah: It's a poor thing, spinning tales
When there's no faith in them.

Alice: Hush, I have it all
Quite clearly now, in spite of that monster baying,—
Two hours to the quarry, hindered by the night,
Then half an hour to bargain, then two hours
For beating back, his boots heavy with snow,
Or a little longer—five hours and more all told—
It is nine o'clock—he went five hours ago,
Or a little more, so that's just how it works—
He should be coming now along the road,
Tired—we must warm the cakes again.

Sarah: Ay, warm them,
A dead man's heavy bearing.

The clock strikes nine.

Alice: That's the time
To bring him back, and we'll call the lanterns in—
He must be near by now—

A man is heard outside, kicking the snow off his boots. ALICE opens the door, and AN OLD MAN comes in, carrying an unlit lantern.

The Old Man: My candle is spent.

JOAN takes the lantern and fits a new candle while they speak.

Alice: And you are going out again?
They have not found him?

The Old Man: No. It's not easy there.

Alice: Then he didn't go to the quarry after all.

Joan: Because they hav'n't found him? That's no sign.

They couldn't if he went.

Alice: Ah yes—how is it?—

He went, and they've been looking on the hills—
But have not found him. Yes—he must have gone.
He should be back. You should have found him for me.

Sarah: She is strange because of the trouble in
the house.

I am old, and that is something.

Alice: It is not that—

I am caught away from myself by the screaming
thing

That scourges the hills. And yet in spite of that
I had reckoned all his doings since he went
Until his time for coming—but you came—
You came instead. That is not right.

The Old Man (taking the lantern and lighting it):
We'll send

Across to the quarry now—

Alice: It is no use—

He'll not have gone.

The Old Man: The night is full of tricks,
But another hour will have ferreted all the hill.

He goes out.

Sarah: Simon who took his money down to market.
And wouldn't change for a good sound fact of cattle,
Fingered his earnings till a hole was worn
And came to the house again with an empty bag.

Leave making tales, my girl, poor tales—they bring no profit,

Keeping the truth outside, and breaking away
To a thimbleful of ash themselves. He is dead.
Think hard on that. When the old king of the world
With the scourge and flail turns his strokes from the wheat

On the goodman's floor and scars the goodman's back,

It is no time to wince. Your man is dead.

And a day and a day make Adam's fall a story.

Alice: Not down to the quarry—then—my little Joan,

Do you know at all what a man becomes to a woman ?
How should you though ? If a man should take
A patch of the barren hill and dig with his hands
And down and down till he came to marble and gold,
And labouring then for a dozen years or twenty
Should build a place finer than Solomon's hall
Till strangers with money to travel came to praise it,
And, when he had dug and hewn and spent his years
To make it a wonder, should go, and be remembered
No more than an onion-pedlar in the street
By the gaping travellers, yet he might be glad,
If his heart was as big as a woman's, for the thing
he'd made,

The strong and lovely thing, knowing it risen
Out of his thought into the talk of the world.
That's how it is. A woman takes a mate,
And like the patient builder governs him
Into the goodman known through a countryside,
Or the wise friend that the neighbours will seek out,
And he, for all his love, may never know
How she has nourished the dear fine mastery
That bids him daily down the busy road
And leaves her by the hearth. And when he is dead
It comes to her that the strength she has given him

To make him a gallant figure among them all
 Has been the thing that has filled her, and she lonely
 Or gossiping with the folk, or about the house.

Sarah: When he is dead.

Alice: Why should I think of that?
 I am crazed, I say, because of the madness loosed
 And beating against the panes. He is not dead—
 You know it woman—Joan, it would be a lie
 To say my man is dead?

Joan: There, sister, wait—
 It is all we can do—there is nothing else to do.

Sarah: When he is dead. Let the thought that
 comes unbidden
 Be welcome, for it's the best thought. When he is
 dead.

Alice: There is treachery against us—my man—
 my dear—
 My brave love—they are trying to part us now!
 But we must be too strong when when
 he is dead

There is a knock at the door. She makes a half movement towards it.

He would not knock. See who it is.

JOAN opens the door and a YOUNG TRAVELLER, buffeted and breathless, comes in.

The Stranger: By Thor!
 There's beauty trampling men like crumpled leaves.
 May I come in till it's gone?

Joan: Surely.

The Stranger: I set
 Every sinew taut against this power,
 This supple torrent of might that suddenly rose
 Out of the fallen dusk and sang and leapt

Like an athlete of the gods frenzied with wine.
It seemed to rear challenging against me,
As though the master from Valhalla's tables,
Grown heady in his revels, had cried out—
Behold me now crashing across the earth
To shake the colonies of antic men
Into a fear shall be a jest, my fellows !
And I measured myself against this bragging pride,
Climbing step by step through the blinding riot
Of frozen flakes swung on the cataract wind,
My veins praising the tyranny that was matched
Against this poor ambitious body of mine.

Alice: The storm is drenched with treachery and
sin—
It is not good to praise it.

The Stranger: You on the hills
Grow dulled, maybe, to the royalty that finds
In your crooked world a thousand splendid hours,
And a storm to you is but a hindered task
Or a wall for mending or a gap in the flock.
But I was strange among this gaiety
Plying black looms in a black firmament,
This joy that was spilt out of the iron heavens
Where pity is not bidden to the hearts
Of the immaculate gods. I was a dream,
A cold monotony suddenly thrust
Into a waking world of lusty change,
A wizened death elected from the waste
To strive and mate with eager lords of tumult.
Beauty was winged about me, darkling speed
Took pressure of earth and smote against my face;
I rode upon the front of heroic hours,
And once was on the crest of the world's tide,
Unseared as the elements.—But he mastered me,
That god striking a star for holiday,
And filled himself with great barbaric laughter
To see me slink away.

Alice: It is no god,
But brainless anger, a gaunt and evil thing
That blame can't reach.

The Stranger: Not all have eyes to see.—
I'm harsh with my words, but I come from a harsh
quarrel
With larger thews than man's.

Alice: Stranger, I'd give
Comely words to any who knocks at the door.
You are welcome—but leave your praising of this
blight.

You safely gabbing of sly and cruel furies,
Like a child laughing before a cage of tigers.
You with your fancy talk of lords and gods
And your hero-veins—young man, do you know this
night

Is eating through my bones into the marrow,
And creeping round my brain till thought is dead,
And making my heart the oldest thing of any?
Do you see those lights?

The Stranger: They seemed odd moving there,
In a storm like this.

Alice: A man is lost on the hills.

The Stranger: That's bad. But who?

Alice: My man is lost on the hills.

Sarah: She has it now; her man is dead on the
hills.

The Stranger: I talked amiss, not knowing of
trouble here.

But why should he be dead?

Alice: The woman is worn,
Her mind is worn, and she lives out of the world.
You ask at once as any wise man would.
I have told her and told and told that he's not dead,

And my young sister, too, though but a girl,
Says it, and she has a head beyond her years.
He is lost for an hour, or maybe for a night,
But never dead. That is the way you think?
It is waiting that steals your proper sense away;
And then, although you know, you let in fear
Blaspheming the thing you know—it is waiting
 to-night
In the midst of an idiot wrath drumming and
 drumming
Like a plague of bees in swarm above your eyes.
I do not know—I have not any strength
To fathom it now, and there is none to tell me.

Sarah: She knows it all, though the thing is hard
 to say.

Alice: Have done! Young stranger, you have
 travelled the world
I think, or have grown learned in great cities,
And can tell the ways things go—is it not wrong
To say that a man because of an ugly night
Should perish on his home-ground? He would find
 a road
Out of a danger such as that, because
That is the way things happen—tell me now?

The Stranger: It is likely that he would.

Alice: You hear that, Joan—
A traveller who has been in foreign dangers
And comes a scholar from a hundred cities
Says it is well, and that we must be patient.

The Stranger: No, I've not travelled, and I only
 say a man
Knowing the hills would likely weather a storm.

Alice: There, there—you must not take it back
 again,
Because you know, and you have said it is well.

Sarah: They cut a stone that is like a small church window,
And they carve a name and a line out of the book,
And when that's done there is nothing then to doubt.

*The storm has suddenly cleared,
The silence falls upon them strangely,
and there is a pause.*

Alice: It is spent at last. He will come from his shelter now.
My dear—come soon. Set the kettle again.
JOAN does so. There is another pause.
I have my thought again. It is an end.
I am broken. There is no pity anywhere.

The Stranger: The lights are coming.
Sarah: The anger never bates,
But scourges us till time betrays the limbs,
And strikes the tongue, and puts pence on the eyes,
And leaves the latch for stranger hands to lift.

*The blackness beyond the window
has given place to clear starlight on
the hills. A NUMBER OF MEN with lan-
terns pass by. There is a knock:
ALICE opens the door, and THE OLD
MAN stands there with his lighted
lantern. She looks at him, and neither
speaks. She turns away to the table.*

Alice: Why have we waited . . . all this time . . . to know . . .

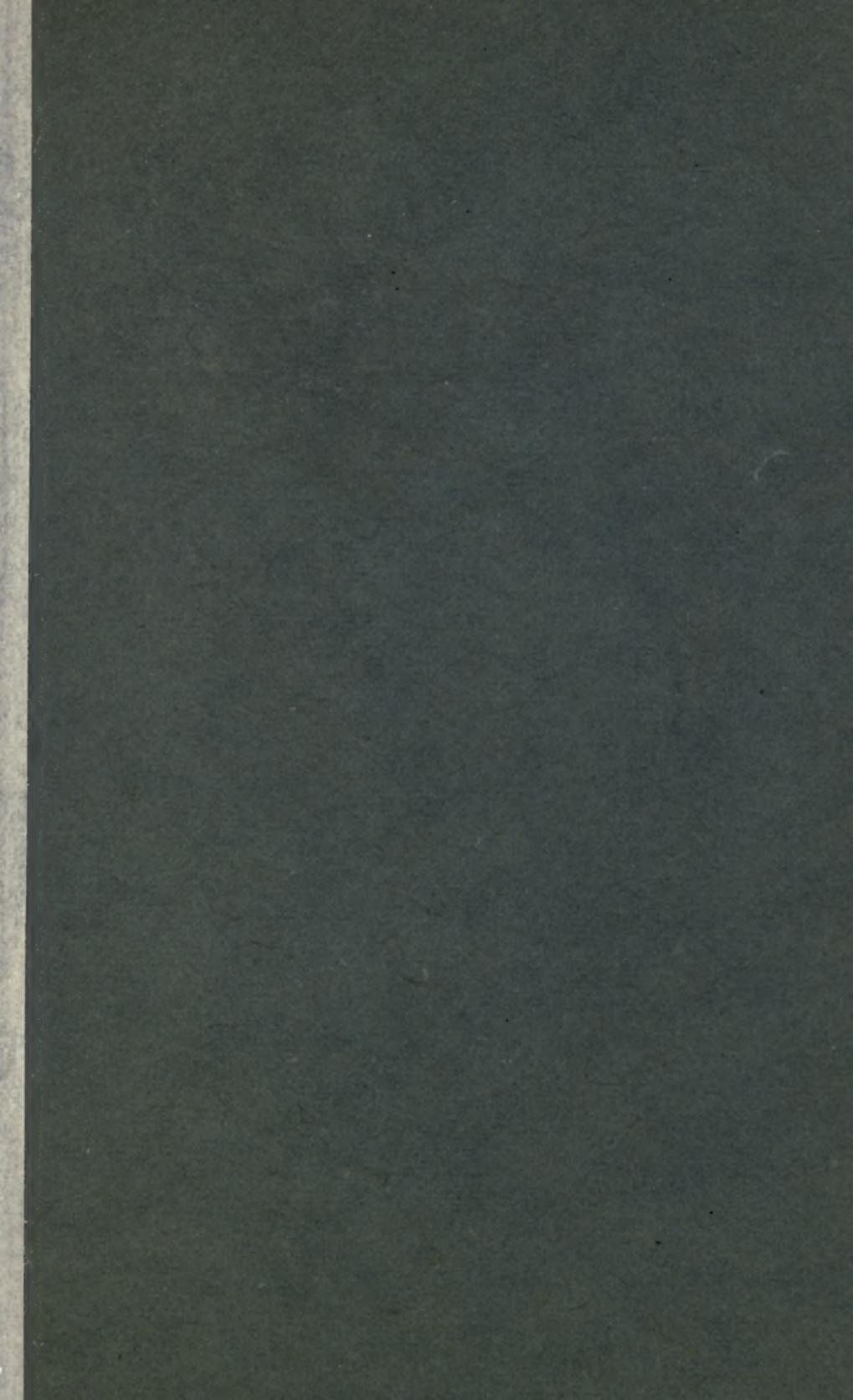
Her sorrow breaks over her.

THE END

THE STORM was first produced at the Birmingham Repertory Theatre, on Saturday, May 8th, 1915, under the direction of the author, with the following cast:—

<i>Alice</i>	-	-	-	-	Cecily Byrne
<i>Joan</i>	-	-	-	-	Betty Pinchard
<i>Sarah</i>	-	-	-	-	Margaret Chatwin
<i>An Old Man</i>		-	-	-	W. Ribton Haines
<i>A Young Stranger</i>		-	-	-	E. Ion Swinley

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